

Transition

Keynote Address

Airlift Tanker Association

The Honorable Michael B. Donley

Secretary of the Air Force

November 7, 2008

General Kross, thank you for that kind introduction, and for over 30 years of leadership in the airlift-tanker community. Your contributions to the mobility world, including your leadership legacy left with Air Mobility Command and U.S. Transportation Command, continue to benefit today's Airmen and their joint partners.

Plus – thank you for inviting me to Anaheim. I grew up in southern California, and many in my family still reside here.

In fact, my first encounter with flying machine was taking a helicopter between Los Angeles Airport and Disneyland! Back in those days, Los Angeles Airways provided regularly scheduled service between LAX and Anaheim on Sikorsky S-61 helicopters.

And of course, a rite of passage for SoCal youth was reaching the age when parents set you free inside the park. By age 13, I had the detailed map of Disneyland completely memorized.

Having been in Washington D.C. for 30 years, I sometimes reflect on how a map of Disneyland would be overlaid on a map of Washington. But I'll leave to your imagination the D.C. location for Adventureland, Frontierland, Tomorrowland and Fantasyland!

Thank you

It is truly a pleasure to be addressing the Airlift Tanker Association. The first thing I would like to do is to thank you for your unfailing support to our Airmen and their families as they deliver *Global Vigilance*, *Global Reach* and *Global Power* to the joint, coalition – and increasingly interagency – team.

At home and abroad, America's joint forces are demonstrating the strength and compassion of the American people. Airlift and air refueling play a key role.

Like capabilities in command and control, net-centric operations, space, and cyberspace, airlift and air refueling represent the types of joint enabling capabilities that undergird today's operational planning and execution. They are crucial.

For decades, the United States has relied on the global, regional and tactical mobility that you provide. As your conference theme of "From the Berlin Airlift to Baghdad" suggests, the airlift-tanker team has bridged the tyranny of distance with enthusiasm and professionalism. You have shrunk oceans, and closed the gap of those difficult "last tactical miles."

You integrate so well into joint, coalition and interagency operations that you make it look seamless and easy – despite the tremendous work that we all know happens on the back end.

Mobility is a national asset and essential capability, especially given our geographic circumstances.

So thank you for all you do in support of today's fight and in preparation for tomorrow's challenges. You play a key role in the national security enterprise, and I applaud all of your efforts.

And for those who are employers of our Guardsmen and Reservists, I offer you a special thanks on behalf of the Total Force. You are tremendous partners in enabling our citizen-Airmen and their families to serve our nation's flag.

Today, with the election over and discussions on the future already underway, I'd like to offer my perspective about the current state of the Air Force. I'll focus primarily on several issues that I think a new administration will need to consider early on.

I'll also briefly highlight how we are working to make this transition a smooth one, and to assist the Air Force as it prepares for the coming Quadrennial Defense Review.

Transition

This election was historic on many fronts, and I echo the president's sentiments about how this election has been uplifting. Generations of Americans are now seeing a dream fulfilled, and the exhilaration is obvious.

Of course, the election also means that we have officially started the transition to the next administration – a hectic and exciting time.

This may surprise you, but for the most part, administration transitions are remarkably similar.

There is exhilaration and anticipation. There are flurries of activity followed by periods of hurry up and wait ... then flurry once again.

But most of all, there are exhausted official-elects who suddenly realize that not only will they have to deal with DC traffic ... they have also just signed up to not sleep for another two, four or six years!

And there are exhausted outgoing officials dreaming of long vacations in the South Pacific. No Blackberrys allowed!

This will be the fifth transition that I have supported, and as Secretary Gates is fond of saying, "none of them are pretty."

In 1980, President-elect Reagan's transition team arrived at the Pentagon in early November, worked hard for about seven weeks, but was dismissed by the incoming SecDef in early January.

In 1988-99, in the intra-party transition, President Reagan's appointees were surprised to learn they would be replaced by the incoming President from their own party.

1993 was a very challenging year for incoming secretary Les Aspin, despite his long experience in the national security community.

And as Director, Administration & Management in 2006 I supported the SecDef transition in which we confronted a variety of post-9/11 security challenges.

Secretary Gates is an even more experienced transition veteran, and for those of us who have seen this movie before, it is tremendously important to get this transition right.

Although all transitions are very much the same, each is also unique.

For example, this is the first transition since 1952 when an incumbent president or vice president was not on the ballot. This freed the Executive Departments and Agencies to begin planning early – and yet avoid getting “too far ahead” of unfolding events.

This is also the first wartime transition in 40 years – the last wartime transition was during Vietnam. Right now, we remain a nation involved in two shooting wars, as well as international efforts to track down terrorists.

In 2004, new legislation provided for starting the security clearance process for transition teams and prospective appointees as early as possible.

In fact, DoD’s transition planning has been underway for many months. To aid the transition, DoD has:

- Established a transition management framework,
- Prepared transition materials for each of the political appointee and critical NC-SES positions,
- Prepared facilities to receive the transition team,
- Bolstered logistics and personnel capacity to efficiently on-board new personnel, and
- Attempted to anticipate the needs and focus on the incoming team based on past transitions, and discussions with those who have been part of the previous processes.

Back in May, Secretary Gates asked for the department’s political appointees to consider staying as long as possible to assist the transition teams. The intent is to avoid the bathtub in leadership that typically accompanies changes in administrations, especially as we remain a nation at war.

Governance is hard work, but smooth transitions can help.

Priorities and Mid-term Studies

The leadership changes of this summer meant that the Air Force started its transition work earlier than expected.

While I had prior experience with the Air Force, it had been 15 years since I had served in an Air Force capacity. Similarly, General Schwartz had been in the joint world for nearly eight years. So both of us came in with steep learning curves.

For several months, we have been working with the Air Force’s stakeholders and its top leadership team to carefully review and refine its strategic direction. The MAJCOM commanders and the assistant secretaries, as well our OSD and interagency partners, have been instrumental to this work.

Across the board, our aim has been to advance stewardship of this world-class institution and to recommit it to the standards of excellence for which it is known the world over.

We have focused on teasing out key issues that need to be addressed across the Air Force as *an institution*. These have included mission areas where the Air Force must bridge the seams across the joint, coalition and interagency worlds in order to be an effective partner.

Immediate Priorities

Through these strategic discussions, five overarching priorities became apparent.

Clearly, the Air Force needs to reinvigorate its nuclear enterprise. And as a nation at war, the Air Force clearly needs to lean forward for today's joint and coalition fight.

Although the Air Force is a technology-oriented service, its people are its most important asset. So we included taking care of and developing Airmen and their families among our strategic priorities.

Modernizing an aging air and space inventory that has seen 18 years of continuous rotations to Southwest Asia is also a top-level concern, as well as acquisition excellence.

Mid-term Studies

Our strategic planning revealed that there were several areas that also required deeper study.

For example, operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are challenging some of our assumptions about how to organize, train and equip the military for efficiency and effectiveness. So we are examining how to improve Air Force contributions for irregular warfare, counterinsurgency and building partnership capacity.

Similarly, a challenging budgetary environment means that we must be deliberate and mindful about our recommendations for resource allocation. We must also carefully consider how to migrate programs that have been funded out of supplementals into the baseline budget.

Unmanned aerial systems, or UAS, have been a growth area for the Air Force during today's operations. But there is much institutional work to be done that will enable the Air Force to bring these capabilities back into the baseline Air Force.

This includes institutionalizing the full scope of the UAS architecture, including the sensor operators, intelligence analysts, communications professionals and pilots that make the UAS "system of systems" provide such tremendous capabilities for today's operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

All of these topic areas, and a few others, are being considered in the course of several mid-term studies that are due by the end of the calendar year.

In many ways, these mid-term studies are "over the horizon" work. We have tried to time the results so that the new leadership will have solid, analytically-sound starting points as they consider these important mission areas.

Organizational Re-alignments

As part of our strategic planning, we also embarked the Air Force on two critical organizational re-alignments. We spent several months discussing these alignments within the Air Force senior leadership team and with our defense and interagency partners.

Our intent is to provide necessary focus on the nuclear mission, restoring excellence in our nuclear stewardship. The changes will also ensure that the Air Force's growing cyber capabilities are fully integrated into the interagency domain of cyberspace.

Nuclear

To create clear, unambiguous focus on the nuclear enterprise, we are consolidating responsibility for nuclear sustainment under the Nuclear Weapons Center at Kirtland Air Force Base. This includes the transfer of some programs and responsibilities from the Space and Missile Center.

We have also proposed establishing a new major command (MAJCOM) to strengthen how we streamline the Air Force's organize, train and equip functions for nuclear operations. And to strengthen nuclear policy and oversight, we established the A10 earlier this week, reporting directly to the Chief. A senior civilian will also be added to the under secretary's staff to assist with policy and oversight of nuclear matters.

At the heart of all of these actions lies the goal of strengthening the precision and reliability of our nuclear enterprise stewardship.

It is important to note that these organizational re-alignments – while tremendously significant – are simply the beginning of what will be a long road of rebuilding excellence in the Air Force nuclear matters. Important changes and fixes are underway. But reversing 15 years of systemic decline will require focused and persistent leadership over many years.

Cyber

Like nuclear matters, cyberspace is clearly an interagency domain – one in which the Air Force will have several partners moving forward. These partners include our sister services, intelligence community and law enforcement agencies.

This means that as the Air Force moves forward with the cyber NAF, we must be attentive to how the defense department is organizing for cyber operations. We must also be attentive to the interagency nature of this work.

Much like our intelligence work, we must be clear at what times Airmen are supporting national cyber missions, and at what times Airmen are supporting COCOM cyber missions.

We must be conscientious of the authorities and funding streams that enable cyber operations, carefully aligning Air Force organize, train and equip functions to changing DoD and interagency contexts.

Cyber is a growing mission area for the Air Force, DoD, law enforcement and the interagency. To help manage this growth and provide focused leadership, we are consolidating many Air Force cyber operations into a single numbered air force under Air Force Space Command.

National Security Space Enterprise

The National Security Space (NSS) enterprise is interagency domain that has received, and continues to deserve, significant attention.

Several high-level reports describe the NSS enterprise as fragmented and that the United States is becoming progressively more dependent on space capabilities. Ironically, this rise in dependence comes at the same time that the space domain is becoming increasingly contested.

Forums like the Space Partnership Council provide opportunities to collaborate across the national security space enterprise. However, my personal view is that the interagency decision-making structure for national security space needs to be strengthened.

Given the space domain's many customers, intradepartmental and interagency seams are understandable, and even to be expected. So a robust interagency governance process that includes many voices in the discussion and decisions makes sense.

Airmen often serve as the connective tissue and integrators across this diverse enterprise, so we are working on a mid-term study to support future deliberations about how to govern this important mission area. We look forward to rich and collaborative discussions with our sister services, the joint team, and our interagency partners to strengthen the nation's space posture.

Upcoming Acquisition Decisions

Acquisition is another area that warrants significant senior leader attention. Several key acquisition decisions have been deferred to the incoming administration, including several acquisition programs managed by the Air Force.

Early on the agenda, for example, will be critical decisions about the F-22 and the C-17 production lines, as well as deciding upon a source selection strategy for the KC-X.

As many of you in this room understand intimately, the past seven years with the tanker program have been very disappointing. I agree with Secretary Gates' decision to establish a "cooling off" period and to defer the tanker decision to the new administration. We are using this time to tee up several options for the new administration's consideration.

Air refueling is fundamental to U.S power projection across the spectrum of conflict. And while we expect the existing tanker fleet to remain viable over the coming years, I am concerned that our sustainment models do not adequately capture the inherent risk of maintaining and flying airframes for what is currently slated as 70, 80 and in a few cases, close to 90 years.

When I visited the Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center last month, I had the opportunity to see first hand the types of corrosion, cracks, fuel bladder degradation and other serious problems that are impacting the KC-135 fleet. I am very concerned with what I saw.

These aircraft were designed in the 1950s using materiel and manufacturing processes that would be considered antiquated by today's standards. Additionally, I was briefed that while our sustainment models account for fatigue, they do not account for the combined effects of fatigue *and* corrosion.

As the KC-135 corrosion problems, F-15 A/B/C/D structural concerns, and A-10 wing cracks demonstrate, we are operating a fleet with many uncertainties regarding its long-term viability.

Our space fleet has similar aging problems as our aircraft fleet – again leading to uncertainty about the long-term viability of some of these systems.

Similar issues are present across our ground surveillance infrastructure that supports our command and control architecture. For example, the TPS-75 radar – which feeds the ground air control system and helps ensure airspace deconfliction and safety of flight – is approaching a 50 years of service.

While it is not my intent to paint an overly bleak picture, I am concerned about the Air Force's modernization, recapitalization and sustainment challenges. Eighteen years of continuous rotations of Air Force personnel and equipment to Southwest Asia have accelerated use of our weapons systems well beyond projections.

Our maintainers deserve tremendous kudos for all they do to keep our systems viable, but the net effect of nearly two decades of continuous rotations is that Air Force systems are “aging out” earlier than programmed.

As the new leadership team considers how and when to “reset” the force, strengthening the acquisition workforce will also frame part of this agenda. Like many communities in the Air Force, the acquisition career field lost many talented professionals as the Air Force has reduced its overall end strength.

Currently, SAF/AQ is working closely with the Air Force Manpower Agency and other elements of the staff to develop manpower models for current and future acquisitions programs. These models will be helpful in establishing credible and programmable manpower requirements for Air Force acquisition and sustainment activities.

Institutionally, we have also carefully crafted our plan for retention bonuses across the service, targeting some of our most stressed career fields – such as enlisted contracting specialists – with stronger incentives to retain their talent.

Irregular Warfare / Counterinsurgency Operations / Building Partnership Capacity

Airmen are delivering a range of capabilities to support operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. From precision strike, joint terminal attack and situational awareness to airlift, wounded care and situational awareness, America's Airmen are “all in” for today's joint and coalition fight.

Their work represents the “day to day” front lines of new territory for the U.S. military – territory that emphasizes the precepts of irregular warfare, counterinsurgency operations, and building partnership capacity. For example, some of America's Airmen are leading combat convoys and conducting counter threat operations – a new use of their skill sets. Others are embedded side-by-side with the ground forces, integrating air, space and cyber capabilities into tactical operations in near-real time – and saving the lives of troops in contact.

The Air Force has made significant progress at the tactical level for IW and COIN. But we need to consider how to institutionalize these mission sets across the Air Force.

As we study these areas, we are finding that with various tweaks – including over 4,000 Battlefield Airmen – a force structure built around the two-Major Combat Operations (MCO) construct appears viable for IW and COIN. Viable, however, does not necessarily mean efficient.

Our charge is to operate effectively and efficiently across the spectrum for conflict – from higher-end major combat operations to lower-end irregular warfare and counterinsurgency operations. And we must adequately support these activities with the kinds of joint enabling capabilities – such as space, cyber, command and control, airlift, and refueling – that are so crucial to success across the entire conflict spectrum.

Given the importance of IW, COIN and BPC in the new *National Defense Strategy*, we are working on a strategy paper to more cogently articulate how the Air Force can strengthen its contributions to our national capabilities for IW and COIN. This is in addition to the mid-term study that I mentioned earlier. Establishing balance among high-end, low-end and joint enabling capabilities is key.

We will also soon publish a *Global Partnership Strategy* that outlines our plans to cultivate global allies and build mutually-beneficial global partnerships that are closely tied to the unique developmental trajectories of our coalition partners.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, building partnership capacity work includes helping to establish foreign internal defense (FID) capabilities within their respective militaries and national police forces. Our Judge Advocate Generals are also educating and training new generations of jurists, helping Iraqis and Afghans learn the principles of good governance that are so critical to maintaining the public trust and confidence.

For other coalition partners, a desire to increase interoperability, integration and interdependence informs our BPC work. In fiscal year 2012, for example, the Air Force will acquire the first of 24 C-27Js, increasing our capacity for tactical lift, as well as our interoperability with coalition partners such as Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Lithuania. Similarly, the United States is working with nine other NATO countries and two partner countries to acquire and sustain three C-17 aircraft, enhancing the capacity for strategic airlift in Europe.

Conclusion

Thank you, once again, to the Airlift Tanker Association for hosting me this morning. General Schwartz and I appreciate the tremendous support that all of you offer to our Airmen and their families.

Right now, as we sit here, the airlift-tanker team is operating in dozens of countries across the globe. Although I am not quite sure how they are doing that with all of you here! They are delivering people and materiel with a precision and reliability that is the envy of the world.

They are providing the air bridge between the United States and distant lands, and they are closing the gap between central supply facilities and the front lines. They are partnering with our medical community to stage our wounded warriors for transport and to care for them en route back home.

As operations abroad and at home are demonstrating, their strategic success increasingly depends on strong interagency relationships.

General Schwartz and I, together with the Air Force senior leadership team and in conjunction with senior defense and interagency officials, have sought to use the past five months to restore excellence in the Air Force nuclear enterprise and to ensure a smooth transition to a new administration.

We have surfaced several areas that require institutional work – including considering how the Air Force can continue to enhance the Nation's capabilities for irregular warfare, counterinsurgency operations, and building partnership capacity, and normalizing the full architecture for unmanned aerial systems into our baseline budget and architectures.

In the course of this work, we have identified several seams in the interagency domains of national security space and cyberspace. These seams will serve as good areas of discussion as the new administration reviews both policy and practice and it is important that we support these discussions with good analytical work up front.

In my experience, transitions do not work well when bureaucracies push their own agendas and individuals push point solutions to complex problems. Transition teams need awareness of key issues, the facts surrounding them, and space in which to discuss and decide them on their own terms.

In my experience, outgoing and incoming administrations want the same things – a strong and secure United States with the capacity and willingness to protect and defend our global interests. They want our allies and friends to feel confident in the United States as a responsible and valued partner. This is particularly important in the shared work of fostering a stable, secure international system – a system based on principles of representative governance, respect for human dignity and the rule of law.

The incoming national security team will need all the support we can give them in the weeks and months ahead, and the Air Force leadership is committed to making this a successful transition.

Thank you for inviting me to join you this morning, and thanks for all you do in support of our national security. It's an honor to be serving with you in the world's finest Air Force.

God bless you and your families, and God bless the United States Air Force!